Studies Link Parental Involvement, Higher Student Achievement

By Lisa Jennings

Although research on parental involvement in education is fragmented and diffuse, evidence suggests that family-school collaboration works.

Studies have consistently linked parental involvement with higher student grades and test scores, more positive student attitudes and behaviors, and improved school climates.

"Basically, people are coming to understand that if you involve parents, kids do better," says Anne T. Henderson, an associate with the National Committee for Citizens in Education, "but also that if you don't involve parents, kids don't do well."

In her 1987 synthesis of research on the topic, *The Evidence Continues to Grow: Parent Involvement Improves Student Achievement*, Ms. Henderson cited 49 studies that she contends provide undisputed proof of the positive correlation between family-school collaboration and student gains. For example:

- Students in schools that maintain frequent contact with their communities outperform those in other schools.
- Children whose parents are in touch with the school score higher on standardized tests than do children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents are not involved.
- Students who are failing in school improve dramatically when their parents are called in to help.

Parental Styles and Learning

Such findings should not be surprising, given a related body of research indicating the influence of parental attributes and behaviors on student learning.

In his explosive 1966 study, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, James S. Coleman concluded that student achievement appeared to be more related to children's family backgrounds than to the material resources of the schools they attended.

According to Mr. Coleman, a professor of education and sociology at the University of Chicago, students' perceptions of themselves and their environment strongly influence academic success. And those perceptions are shaped largely at home.

A 1983 study by Reginald M. Clark, *Family Life and School Achievement: Why Poor Black Children Succeed or Fail*, reiterated the influence of parental values and behaviors on student learning. In an in-depth study of 10 poor, black families in Chicago, Mr. Clark concluded that the child-rearing style of parents—rather than their marital status, education, or income—determined a youngster's success in school.

In the homes of high achievers, parents communicated frequently with their offspring, provided strong encouragement of academic pursuits, set clear and consistent limits, monitored how children's time was spent, and offered a warm and nurturing environment.

A year later, Herbert J. Walberg, a professor of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, would describe a "curriculum of the home" related to high student achievement. Its characteristics include parents and children who converse about everyday events, parental encouragement and discussion of leisure-time reading, joint monitoring and analysis of television viewing, and parents expressing affection for their children and interest in their academic and personal growth.

A similar vein of research by Sanford M. Dornbusch, director of Stanford University's Center for the Study of Families, Children, and Youth, has documented a consistent relationship between how parents interact with and respond to their children and positive student performance.

In a survey of 8,000 San Francisco Bay-area high-school students, Mr. Dornbusch found that youngsters with "authoritative" parents tended to have better grades. Such parents set clear rules and standards for their teenagers, encouraged a verbal give-and-take, and recognized the rights of both adults and children.

Children of authoritative parents were deemed to be more socially responsible and more independent, and they exhibited more developed social and cognitive skills.

If schools could somehow influence or build on the relationship between parents and youngsters in their homes, such research suggests, they could provide a powerful spur for academic learning.

But parent involvement alone may not be able to overcome the effects of poverty.

In a study of the parents of 700 6th graders in Oakland, Calif., Charles S. Benson, a professor of education at the University of California at Berkeley, concluded that parental participation helped students achieve more in school, regardless of their family's income, but that it did not close the gap between poor and nonpoor children.

Widespread Effects

Involving parents in their children's schooling, however, has benefits beyond the rise and fall of test scores and student grades. It is also related to more positive attitudes toward teachers and schools, improved teacher morale, and enriched school climates.

Research by Joyce L. Epstein, director of the Effective Middle Schools Program at Johns Hopkins University, has found that parents in classrooms where teachers encourage parental involvement are more likely than other parents to recognize that the teacher worked hard to interest them; feel that they should help at home; understand what their child is being taught in school; have a more positive attitude about the teacher's interpersonal skills; and rate the teacher higher in overall teaching ability.

In a 1979 study, Ira Gordon, a professor of education at the University of North Carolina, found that the more parents participated in multiple parent-involvement activities, the more the quality of the school environment improved.

Case studies by Don Davies, president of the Institute for Responsive Education in Boston, also indicate that staff morale is positively swayed by parent participation.

Other studies have demonstrated correlations between parent participation in schools and improved student attendance, a reduction in suspension rates for disciplinary reasons, and an improved attitude toward homework.

Benefits for Parents

Family-school collaboration can also benefit parents themselves.

During the 18 years that James P. Comer headed an experimental school-improvement program at Yale University's Child Study Center, many of the participating parents became so motivated that they eventually obtained General Educational Development diplomas. And seven parents went on to earn a college degree and enter a profession.

According to Dr. Comer, "the failure to bridge the social and cultural gap between home and school may lie at the

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Ed Drury/Flint Public Schools

Theresa Morrison and her daughter, Dava, work together on a puzzle as part of the "Families Learning Together" program sponsored by the Home and School Institute.

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P. Comer, Maurice Falk Professor of Psychiatry at Yale University.

Now that many teachers are also working divorced mothers, such circumstances no longer carry the stigma they once did. But schools have not adjusted well to the new family configurations.

"The changes in family structure that have been so pervasive make many of the mechanisms and ideas of the past for working with families apply only to a minority of parents," notes Sanford M. Dornbusch, director of the Center for the Study of Families, Children, and Youth at Stanford University.

"The afternoon PTA meeting doesn't get any of the working parents," he says. "The evening meeting has difficulty attracting the single parents. The lack of norms for the behavior of stepparents means they're often not involved in parent-school activities."

"Traditionally," Mr. Coleman notes, "the school has needed the support and sustenance provided by the family, in its task of educating children."

"Increasingly," he asserts, "the family itself needs support and sustenance from the school—and through the school, from the other families with children in the school—in its task of raising children."

To be effective, Mr. Coleman urges, schools must "change as families change, must be adjusted to the institution they complement."

The 'Difficult Part of Teaching'

Indeed, changing family circumstances are forcing many teachers to spend increasing amounts of time and energy on noninstructional demands. Broken homes, poverty, violence, and drug abuse are bringing thousands of children to school with needs well beyond the three "R's" of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

In a survey of 22,000 teachers, conducted by the Carnegie Foundation last year, 89 percent said "neglected children" were a problem, and about 40 percent reported "poor nutrition" among students.

"The difficult part of teaching is not the academics," one junior-high teacher told the Carnegie Foundation. "The difficult part is dealing with the great number of kids who come from socially stressed homes."

But schools and teachers have traditionally balked at the notion of becoming social workers, a role for which they are neither equipped nor trained.

Rather than building on parents' strengths to alleviate children's distress, many educators continue to characterize parents as part of the problem.

Often, teachers say they are being unfairly asked to take on roles that the parents have abdicated.

"What I get frustrated with is not the kids," says Madre Mack, a mathematics teacher at the Graham Park Middle School in Prince William County, Va. "It's the adults. I feel I have to take up where they leave off."

"There's not enough time spent with the children," she asserts. "There's not enough support. There's not enough communication."

In response to such concerns, states such as Arkansas have passed laws allowing parents to be fined when their children skip school. Wisconsin was the first state in the nation to reduce welfare benefits for families whose teenage children have unexcused absences from class.

At least five other states—Florida, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, and North Carolina—have since linked public assistance to school attendance, and several others are considering such plans.

"I know how educators feel when they see kids come to school who haven't been fed or look like they've been neglected or abused," says Anne T. Henderson, an associate with the National Committee for Citizens in Education.

"It just makes them sick. And I sympa-

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root of the poor academic performance" of many low-income children.

Dr. Comer's model attempts to break down the barrier of distrust between home and school by involving parents in school decisionmaking and in activities that support the school program.

By bringing mental-health professionals, educators, parents, and others together to focus on children's academic, social, and emotional development, Dr. Comer and his colleagues were able to reduce parental apathy and improve student achievement and attendance at two predominantly low-income elementary schools in New Haven, Conn.

Unanswered Questions

Despite such positive findings across a wide array of studies, however, research on parent involvement remains problematic and sketchy.

Although the correlation between parent involvement in education and student achievement has been well documented, there is little evidence of any direct, causal link.

"For the most part," Sharon Lynn Kagan, associate director of Yale University's Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, writes in a review of the research, "correlation studies of school-based parent involvement and achievement are not sufficiently precise to determine the mechanism by which achievement is influenced."

Because the reasons for involving parents in schools vary widely and the approaches to working with families are so diverse, research on the topic has been similary diffuse.

"What we need is a more robust research base; we are just not looking at this broadly enough," Ms. Kagan argues. "While some organizations are doing wonderful work, one or two organizations will not be able to counter decades of malaise."

Where To Focus Resources?

Because the research does not pinpoint which kinds of parent-involvement activities are most effective under different circumstances, practitioners continue to argue about where to focus their resources.

For example, some practitioners want parents to work with their children at home, based on research that indicates this helps individual children succeed. Others advocate bringing parents into the school, because that may have a carryover effect on the school climate as a whole and on average student performance.

A study by Ms. Epstein suggests that the two approaches may complement each other.

She found that having some parents active at the school itself encouraged teachers to request other parents to work with their youngsters at home.

Mr. Gordon's 1979 review of the research concluded that parent-involvement programs that are comprehensive and long-lasting—and that enable parents to assume various roles in schools—have the most effect on both students and school performance.

But until researchers can ferret out which kinds of parent-school partnerships are most effective in achieving which aims, such debates will probably continue.

Inside the 'Black Box'

"There is a recognition now that parental involvement is just plain common sense," says Mr. Davies of the I.R.E. "But what we need now is to look inside that 'black box' between parental involvement and student achievement to discover what works."

Today, a "second generation" of research may yield some clues in that direction, according to Ms. Epstein.

"It just isn't possible at this point to say that we have any real knowledge about what schools might do to work with families," she notes. "Now we are being forced to say, 'If families are important, what are we going to do about it?' "

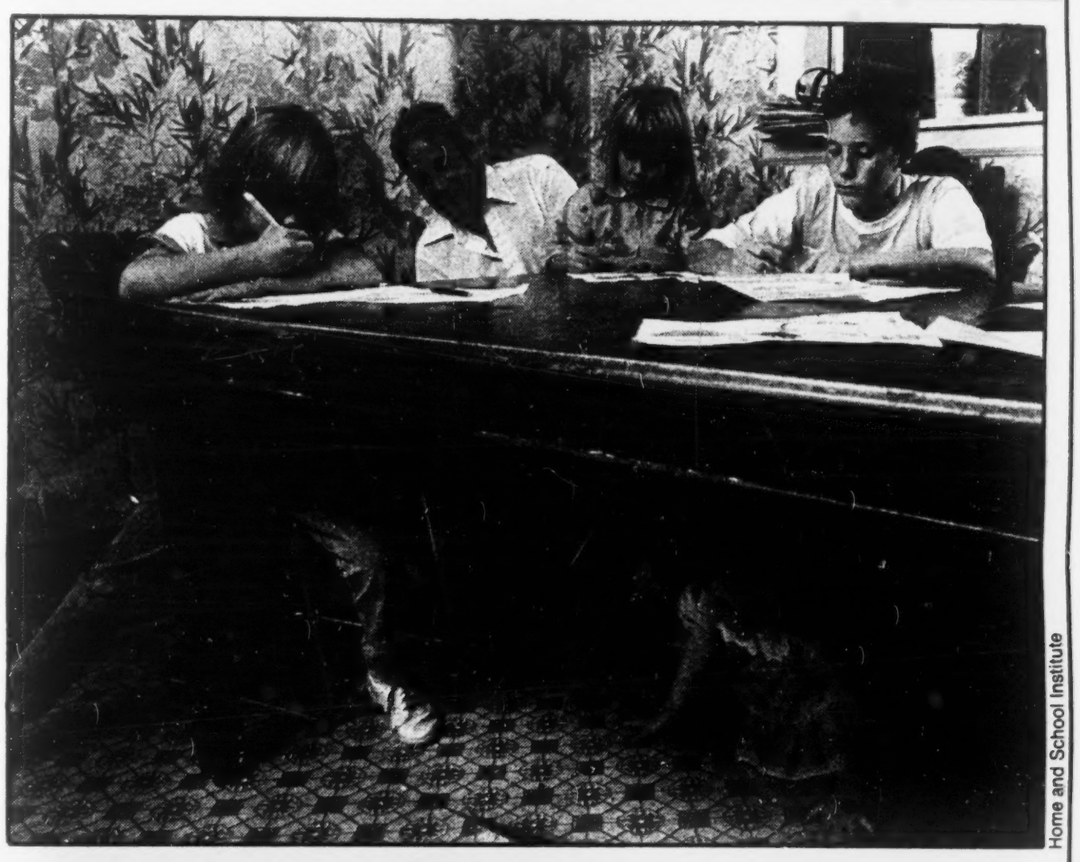
In the next few months, Ms. Epstein is expected to release a long-awaited report that evaluates parent-involvement efforts in Baltimore.

In June, the I.R.E. is expected to release the results of a two-year project, "Schools Reaching Out," designed to test new ways in which schools and parents in low-income communities can work together. Two urban schools—one in Boston, the other in New York City—have served as laboratories for the project's work, which will be analyzed and evaluated by a national commission of scholars and practitioners.

Last month, the institute built on that project by creating a "League of Schools Reaching Out." The 24 schools in the network will share information about parent-involvement practices, promote successful programs, and provide for a stronger scientific foundation to support family-school collaboration.

In addition, the Rockefeller Foundation in January launched a $15-million, five-year effort to replicate Dr. Comer's school-improvement model nationwide. It is currently used in about 100 schools across the country.

And the U.S. Education Department's office of educational research and improvement has announced plans to establish a research and development center on families and schools.



Home and School Institute

In the absence of one particular recipe for success, an array of programs has sprung up in an attempt to redefine the social contract between parents and schools. In some, parents are encouraged to become involved in learning activities with their children at home. Above, Scott Morrow, a single parent of five, uses the MegaSkills program, developed by the Home and School Institute, to work with his children. In other programs, such as one in Worcester, Mass., parents are encouraged to visit their child's school to participate in activities designed to strengthen the home-school connection.

Indeed, growing interest in and attention to the topic of parent involvement in education has made many researchers hopeful about the future. But they remain cautious about whether such rhetoric will result in widespread change.

"It may be very fashionable now," Mr. Davies says, "but that doesn't mean there will be that much difference in practice."

"Where we can go from here," he cautions, "we'll have to wait and see." ■

Information for this article was also gathered by Senior Editor Lynn Olson.

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thize with that. When you see a kid who's way behind in school, who has problems learning and so on, you just tend to blame it on the family. It's a natural thing to do."

"On the other hand," she cautions, "it's really a minority of kids."

Perceptions among parents and teachers of the other side as uncaring or irresponsible serve to heighten the distance between them. Such images can lead to an escalating cycle of mutual blame and recrimination that Ms. Henderson views as largely unproductive.

'Dreams for the Future'

Many teachers tend to write off poor and minority parents, in particular, assuming that they cannot or will not contribute to their children's education. But recent research rebuts such beliefs.

Studies of poor and minority parents in Maryland, New England, and the Southwest have found that they care deeply about their children's education, but may not know how to help.

"We poor parents have dreams for our children's future," says Susie Stith, a resident in a Chicago public-housing project. "Education is crucial to us; it is our kids' only legal ticket to a better life."

Yet, in a study of approximately 350 teachers and low-income parents in Boston and abroad, Don Davies, president of the Institute for Responsive Education, found that most poor parents had little or no contact with the schools, and what communication they did have was negative.

Mr. Davies speculates that few low-income parents come to school on their own, both because they are intimidated by teachers and administrators and because of their own negative experiences as students.

According to Ms. Epstein's research, teachers who do not work with parents typically claim that adults with less than a high-school degree lack the ability or willingness to help their children.

But teachers who frequently use home-learning activities are able to involve parents of all educational backgrounds and socioeconomic levels.

"If schools don't work to involve parents," Ms. Epstein asserts, "then parent education and family social class are very important for deciding who becomes involved."

"But if schools take parent involvement seriously, and work to involve all parents," she adds, "then social class and parents' level of education decrease or disappear as important factors."

Based on her research, Ms. Epstein speculates that a relatively small percentage of parents have personal problems so severe that they cannot work cooperatively with teachers, given the proper assistance.

Creating Solutions: Parents as Partners

For the vast majority of parents and teachers, the tattered relationship between families and schools can still be repaired. But it will require a fundamental reorientation on the part of educators.

"Unless we can create schools in which parents are considered to be an important resource," Mr. Levin cautions, "in which there are decisions that parents can make that have meaning for their children and their schools, I think that parental involvement must necessarily be limited."

While schools can reward, demand, and cajole children to learn, experts argue, parents provide the building blocks that make such learning possible.

The technical term they use is "social capital." But what it amounts to are the home and community resources available to help children gain the self-esteem, motivation, and discipline needed for education.

"Many kinds of development, in social, psychological, emotional, moral, linguistic, and cognitive areas, are critical to future academic learning," Dr. Comer of

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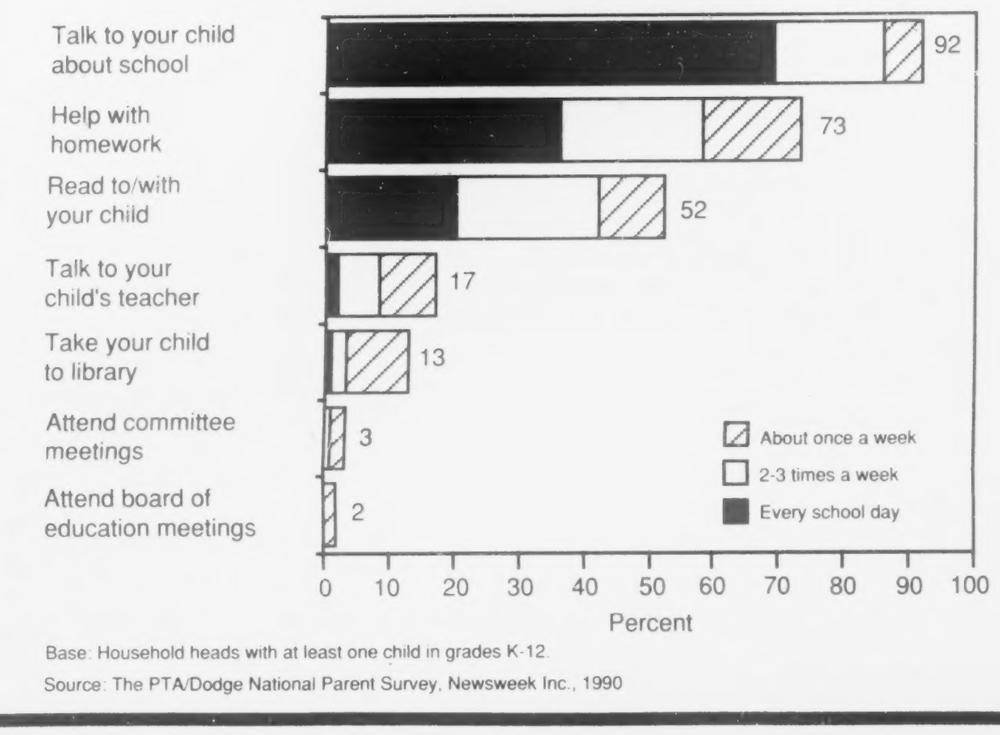


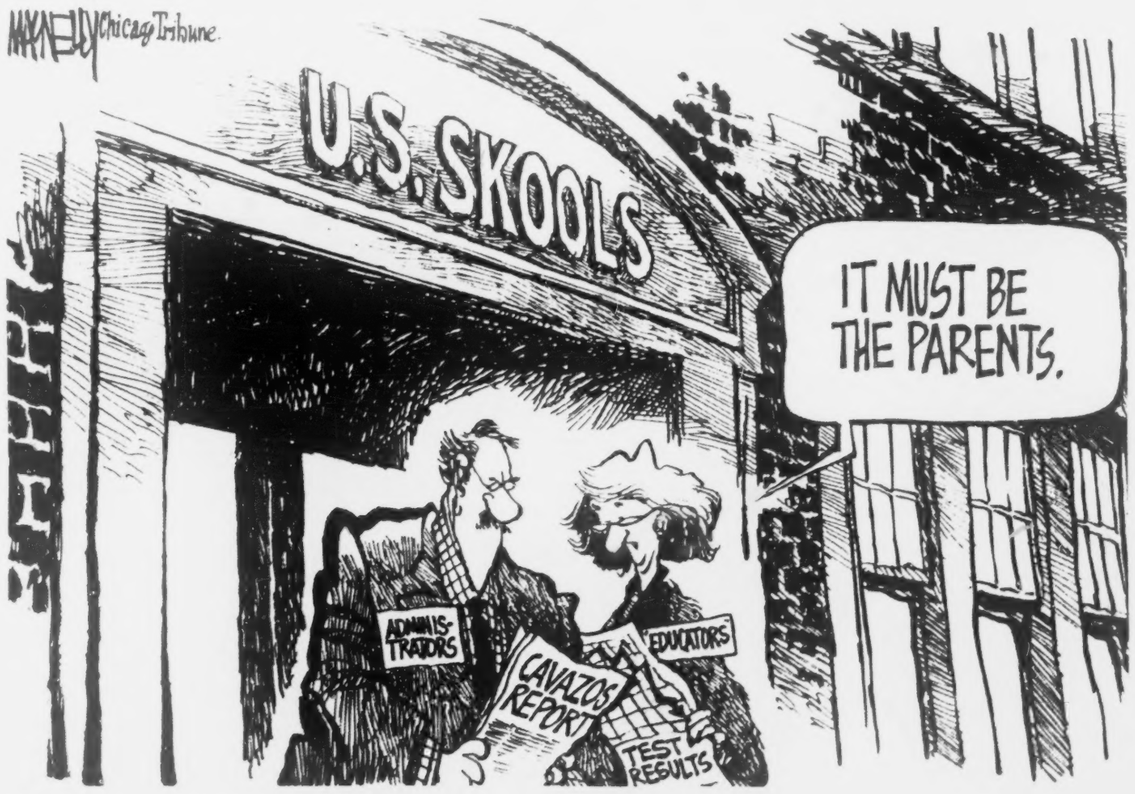
Base: Household heads with at least one child in grades K-12.

Source: The PTA/Dodge National Parent Survey, Newsweek Inc., 1990

AP/Newsfinder

Jeffrey High

Joyce L. Epstein, director of the Effective Middle Schools Program at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, estimates that more than 70 percent of parents have never been involved in traditional volunteer activities at their children's school. In Pittsburgh, above, Mary Bradley reads to schoolchildren at the Rehabilitation Institute as part of a foster grandparent program. And in Seattle, right, a parent-volunteer helps out in an elementary-school science class.



Parents, Teachers Seek To Repair Tattered School-Family Relationship

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the Yale Child Study Center says. "The attitudes, values, and behavior of the family and its social network strongly affect such development."

When family and school act in tandem to support a child's education, he asserts, the transition from home life to school goes relatively smoothly. But when the two cultures clash, or do not reinforce each other's work, children's academic learning suffers.

The 'Greatest Lever' for Growth

The most striking illustration of that assertion stems from the research of Mr. Coleman at the University of Chicago. In a 1987 study, Mr. Coleman and his colleague, Thomas Hoffer, found that Catholic high schools in general do a better job of educating students and have lower dropout rates than do public schools or most non-Catholic private schools.

They speculated that the difference lies in the strongly supportive community built up between parents and teachers at Catholic schools, based on a shared set of beliefs and values.

Such cohesive communities of adults are almost totally absent from most public schools, Mr. Coleman asserts, which for the last century have viewed their primary mission to be freeing children from the constraints and backgrounds of their families.

If the public schools could somehow reestablish a "true partnership" with the families of their students, speculates Edward Zigler, Sterling Professor of Psychology at Yale University, they could tap the "greatest lever" available for spurring children's growth and development.

Undergirding Mr. Zigler's contention are decades of research showing an overwhelmingly positive relationship between parents' involvement in education and student achievement.

In schools that value parents, findings include higher student grades and test scores, better long-term academic achievement, more positive attitudes and behaviors, and more effective programs.

But the research does not address which strategies are most effective for reaching out to which parents. *(See story on pages 20-21.)*

Reaching Children Early

In the absence of one particular recipe for success, an array of programs and practices have sprung up in an attempt to redefine the social contract between parents and schools.

Efforts to strengthen the learning environment of children under age 6, and to promote parental practices that would foster later success in school, constitute one of the most popular of the new approaches.

Such programs try to strengthen the family's capacity to raise its children by providing information about child development; offering advice on parenting; supplying guidance on child-rearing issues; and, when necessary, referring families to other community agencies.

To do so, they may rely on a combination of drop-in centers, home visits, developmental child care, parent-support groups, and parent education.

In 1984, Missouri became the first state to mandate that every district offer a program of parenting education to the families of infants and preschoolers. Since then, 32 states have launched similar efforts, primarily on a smaller scale.

A follow-up study found that at the end of 1st grade, children involved in Missouri's pilot project scored significantly higher on reading and math tests than a comparison group and had parents who were more involved in their education.

The cost-effective nature of such programs—and their emphasis on the primacy of the family—have earned them a growing cachet among policymakers, says Heather B. Weiss, director of the Harvard Family Research Project.

Just last month, the White House and all 50 governors announced as a goal that, by the year 2000, all parents will have access to the training and support they need to be their children's first teachers.

'Changing the Trajectory'

But efforts to reach out to families must not diminish once children reach school age, experts argue.

"The first five years of life are a very important period," Mr. Zigler acknowledges. "But it's become counterproductive in that it's become a magic period: If we just do everything we can during the preschool years, then everything is going to be wonderful during school."

"That's just not true," he adds. "Changing the trajectory of development of a child really calls for a lot of effort, and it has to be done year after year after year. That is why the family is so important, because the family is there year after year after year."

Yet, research indicates that teachers' efforts to work with families—and parents' attempts to remain involved in their children's education—drop off dramatically as children age. That decline is already evident as early as the 2nd or 3rd grade, and it continues to plummet throughout the middle- and high-school years.

"It's still not considered part of the professional portfolio of the educator to work with parents," Ms. Henderson of the N.C.C.E. complains. "Efforts to involve parents are seen as something supplementary to the school—a sort of luxury that's nice if you have the time and staff to do it."

A study by Mr. Dornbusch of almost 300 high-school teachers in the San Francisco Bay area found that most expressed a general reluctance to spend the increased amount of time and energy that working with parents would require.

Rebuilding Ties With Parents Of School-Age Children

Despite such findings, there are a variety of ways in which educators can reach out to parents with school-age children.

They range from improving the communications between home and school, to creating more informal forums in which parents and teachers can meet, to helping parents work with their children at home, or welcoming them into the decisionmaking structure.

Communicating with parents about school practices and about their children's progress is one of the most obvious ways to work with families.

But the form, frequency, content, and timing of such communications can vary widely. In an effort to make such communications more effective and meaningful, schools have developed multilingual documents; parent-resource centers within schools; and home visits by teachers or parent coordinators, who are specially hired for that purpose.

According to Ms. Henderson, these regular activities and contacts between par-

ents and schools form the "core of the family-school relationship." But they have also been the least often noted and discussed by policymakers, in part because they appear so pedestrian.

School-Based Participation

Parents also can be involved at the school itself, by attending student performances, sports competitions, and workshops, or by serving as volunteers.

Mr. Comer asserts that the presence of parents and other community members in the schools may be particularly important for low-income children, because it heightens their sense of belonging and reduces the dissonance between home and school.

In addition, he notes, social events provide the one opportunity for parents and teachers to interact in relaxed and positive ways, "where the differences can be minimized and become unimportant."

Through such avenues, he says, schools can restore the trust and mutual respect that have been missing between teachers and parents since the early 1900's. Other studies suggest that if about one-third of parents in a school are reasonably active at the school itself, all children start doing better.

Unfortunately, a limited number of parents participate in such events.

A national survey released this month by *Newsweek* found that more than half of all parents said they had not attended a single back-to-school night since the school year began, while 54 percent had not gone to a single meeting of the PTA or other parent organization. Parents cited lack of time and conflicting work schedules as the most frequent reasons for their low participation.

Ms. Epstein estimates that more than 70 percent of parents have never been involved in traditional volunteer activities.

David L. Williams Jr., a researcher at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, speculates that parents steer clear of such roles in part because they have so little say in shaping them.

Most parent participation at schools is limited to activities that the "school deems appropriate," Mr. Williams asserts. "Typically, parents don't have input into that kind of involvement, or they have a limited range of things to select from."

Another study, published this year by the National Research Council, found that public schools with high minority enrollments are less likely to use volunteers and attract fewer of them than suburban schools do. Volunteers are also more likely to be white, well-educated, and middle class.

Unless schools tackle such problems directly and use diverse strategies to reach out to all parents, Mr. Davies of the I.R.E. suggests, they could end up widening the gap between poor and nonpoor students.

The 'Meat and Potatoes'

Because so few families have the time or inclination to participate in traditional school-based activities, educators are beginning to look at avenues for involving parents beyond the schoolhouse door.

"I'd like to see more attention to the type of involvement parents want most," Ms. Epstein says, "how to work with their own children at home in ways that help the student succeed and that keep the parents as partners in their children's education across the grades."

According to Ms. Rich, involving parents in learning activities at home constitutes the "meat and potatoes" of parent involvement.

These activities range from requesting that parents read to their children on a regular basis, to asking them to supervise and assist children in their homework, to providing games and other exercises that build on but do not duplicate in-school learning. For example, MegaSkills, the program developed by Ms. Rich, emphasizes special "recipes" that parents can use at home that supplement, rather than replicate, formal classroom instruction.

According to Ms. Epstein, strengthening such home-learning activities has the potential to reach more parents than any other type of family-school relationship.

"Although only some parents are active at school," she notes, "more than 90 percent help their children with homework activities at least once in a while."

Parents as Decisionmakers

An increasingly vocal sector of the parent community, however, is not content to sit at home and leave decisionmaking to others.

Since the late 1800's, parents have

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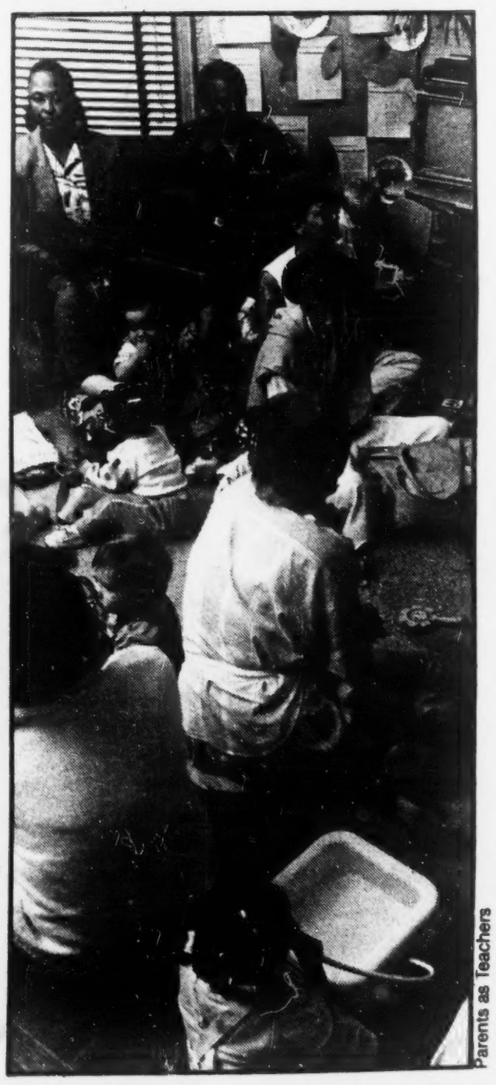
Parents and Teachers Evaluate Parental Involvement at Their School

Do you agree or disagree that . . . ?

	Total	Level of School: Elementary	Junior High	High School
		percent agreeing		
Our school does a good job of encouraging parental involvement in sports, arts, and other non-subject areas				
Parents	77	76	74	79
Teachers	77	73	77	86
Our school does a good job of encouraging parental involvement in educational areas				
Parents	73	82	71	64
Teachers	80	84	76	70
Our school only contacts parents when there is a problem with their child				
Parents	55	46	62	63
Teachers	23	18	22	33
Our school does not give parents the opportunity for any meaningful roles				
Parents	22	18	22	28
Teachers	8	8	12	7

Source: The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1987

Parents as Teachers

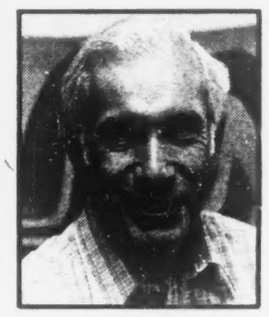


Parents as Teachers

In 1984, Missouri became the first state to mandate a comprehensive program of parenting education in every school district. Top right, Mary Ann Lucas, a parent-educator in the Normany (Mo.) school district, works with Tiffany Jones and her parents, Willie and Lynne. Far right, parents and their toddlers pack a Parents as Teachers meeting in Wayside, Mo., to hear a presentation by a speech-and-language pathologist. Right, a father and his daughter at a parent-education session in Minnesota.

The attitudes, values, and behavior of the family and its social network strongly affect a child's development.

–James P. Comer



The lack of norms for the behavior of step-parents means they're often not involved in parent-school activities.

–Sanford M. Dornbusch

Efforts to involve parents are seen as something supplementary to the school—a sort of luxury.

–Anne T. Henderson

Changing the trajectory of development of a child really calls for a lot of effort.

–Edward Zigler

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formed advocacy groups external to the school system to try to influence school policies and practices. But now, some parents are fighting for a direct role in school governance. Efforts in this area range from advisory committees that are fairly limited in scope to parent-dominated councils that have a major say in school decisions.

In between those two extremes, school officials are beginning to consult with parents on a wide array of topics having to do with educational policies and practices.

As public agencies, Mr. Davies asserts, schools have an obligation to open up their decisionmaking process to the people most affected by them, "and parents are the most affected group." Others argue that because parents know their children best and have a vested interest in their welfare, they are most suited to speak on their behalf.

But those views are not shared by everyone. In a survey of parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school-board members in the Southwest, Mr. Williams found that parents and educators disagreed about the role of parents in running schools.

While parents were eager to engage in a variety of activities, ranging from tutoring their child to participating on school committees, principals and teachers favored limiting parents to more traditional avenues, such as attending class plays and holding bake sales. A substantial majority of teachers and principals did not view parents as having an appropriate or useful role in educational or personnel matters.

Dramatic reforms in Chicago could provide evidence of whether parent participation in school governance works. Under the Chicago reform law enacted by the state legislature in 1988, councils at each of the city's 570 schools will make major decisions about curriculum, budgets, and the hiring and firing of principals. Each council has 11 members: 2 teachers, 2 community representatives, the principal, and 6 parents.

The reforms could shed light on how much training parents need to be effective decisionmakers, whether those who serve on governance committees truly reflect the views of their surrounding community, and whether parent-dominated councils can focus on academic concerns and not become mired in politics.

"I think a lot of anxious eyes are on Chicago," Ms. Henderson says. "I'm worried that something awful will happen there and everybody will say: 'See, if you turn it over to the parents, it's a total disaster.' "

She cautions that parent participation in school governance will probably always be limited to a self-selecting few.

"I don't think a lot of parents really want a big role in governance," Ms. Henderson asserts. "They just want to feel that they're consulted about things and that they could change something that they don't like. It's a rare parent who wants to be involved in day-to-day decisionmaking about the school."

Creating Multiple Options

According to Ms. Henderson, parents should have a variety of options for participating in their children's education, based on their individual needs and predilections. The exact nature of such participation is less important, she asserts, than the need to make it reasonably well-planned, comprehensive, and long-lasting.

But whatever form parent involvement takes, educators caution, it must connect with the deeper academic mission of the school.

"There's got to be some purpose to what you're doing with parents," Mr. Levin of Stanford University argues, "or it becomes just cosmetic. The focus has got to be on the child. That's what motivates parents."

Whatever the motivation for parents, the motivations for educators are becoming obvious.

As Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, notes, voucher proposals, state takeovers of academically bankrupt districts, and other radical measures indicate a deep and fundamental dissatisfaction with the nation's school system.

The coming decade could signal either a new vitality for public education in this country, he and others assert, or a mass exodus from the public schools by those who can afford to leave.

Unless educators break down the isolation between schools and communities, Mr. Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation warns, the public could abandon public education in the next century.

Rebuilding ties with parents could represent the first step on the road back to recovery.

"Parents are part of the equation of human growth and development," Mr. Zigler says. "Home is important. School is important. If you could get both of them integrated, working toward the same goals, you'd have a very potent force." ■

This special series on parental involvement in education is being underwritten by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Five Types of Parental Involvement

Joyce L. Epstein, director of the Effective Middle Schools Program at the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, has identified five types of parental involvement in education:

- **Basic Obligations of Parents**—Provide for children's health and safety, prepare children for school, teach family-life skills through the school years, and build positive home conditions that support school learning and behavior.
- **Basic Obligations of Schools**—Communicate with parents about school programs and children's progress. Vary the form and frequency of communications such as memos, notices, report cards, and conferences to improve all parents' understanding of school programs and children's progress.
- **Parent Involvement at School**—Serve as volunteers to assist teachers, administrators, and children in classrooms or other areas of the school. Attend student performances, sports events, or other activities, or participate in workshops or other programs for own education and training.
- **Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home**—Initiate learning activities at home. Monitor or assist children at home—with guidance from teachers—in activities coordinated with student's classwork.
- **Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy**—Serve in decisionmaking roles in parent groups, advisory councils, or other committees or groups at the school, district, or state level. Serve as activists in independent advocacy groups that monitor the schools and work for school improvement.

David Phillips

AP/Newsfinder

An increasingly vocal sector of the parent community is fighting for a direct role in school governance. Efforts range from advisory committees that are fairly limited in scope to parent-dominated councils that have a major say in school decisions. Below, more than 6,000 members of Chicago's first parent-led school councils were sworn in last fall.

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EDUCATION WEEK

American Education's Newspaper of Record | Volume IX, Number 29 · April 11, 1990 | *© 1990 Editorial Projects in Education / $2.50*

Bush Aides Mull Effect of Chart On Goals Efforts

Secretary To Release Comparisons on May 2

By Julie A. Miller

WASHINGTON—Bush Administration officials are concerned that the impending release of the Education Department's controversial "wall chart" could adversely affect ongoing work with governors on the national education goals adopted little more than a month ago.

And some sources said Administration officials had suggested to Secretary of Education Lauro F. Cavazos that the department reconsider the continued existence of the wall chart.

The 1990 edition of the chart, a state-by-state compendium of educational vital statistics, will be unveiled on May 2, Secretary Cavazos said in a recent interview.

Mr. Cavazos said he arranged the interview because he wanted to get the word out that he plans to proceed with this year's chart, but that the Administration does not view it as an effort to measure progress toward the goals or as the only measure of educational achievement.

"Very frankly, here we are at a time when we're working with all the states [and] the Administration has been working with the governors," Mr. Cavazos said, and some people think that publishing a wall chart or working on other measurements is an "either/or" situation.

"I never got really serious about not doing it, but I wanted to make sure people understood why we're doing it," he said.

"I felt that it was important to go ahead with this and continue to refine it, [because] there's no other national measuring system in the country," Mr. Cavazos said. "We intend to work with the governors in the months ahead beyond that presentation to refine it."

The Secretary hinted that he had been asked to consider dropping the wall chart, but he did not elaborate.

However, an Education Department source and another source familiar with the situation said they understood that Roger B. Porter, the President's domestic-policy adviser, and Christopher T. Cross, assistant secretary for educational research and improvement, had urged that the wall chart not be

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Uneasy Alliance Marks Launch of L.A. Plan

Year After Strike, an Attempt at 'Power Sharing'

By Ann Bradley

LOS ANGELES—One year after weathering a divisive teachers' strike, the Los Angeles Unified School District has embarked upon a new program of "bottom up" management that is drawing teachers, parents, and administrators into an uneasy alliance to improve the schools.

Despite attempts to bury past animosities, however, many here say the scars left from that 11-day strike may hamper efforts to give schools wide decisionmaking authority.

Restructuring in the nation's second-largest school district must also compete for attention with a host of pressing problems, including severe overcrowding, a projected $180-million budget deficit, and the special needs of many of the system's 610,000 students, about one-third of whom speak limited or no English.

"I don't think this district is ready for school-based management, but it probably never will be ready," said Marion Hogue, a parent who serves on the districtwide School-Based Management Central Committee. "I'm willing to say we have to go for it."

Such attitudes, observers here say, may represent the troubled school system's best hope for substantive improvement.

The district is now "at a tilt point between the agony of the past and some in-

Continued on Page 10

United Teacher

The Central Council will recommend up to 70 schools for the new program.

Unexpectedly Little Interest Found In State Offers To Waive Key Rules

By Lynn Olson

When the nation's governors adopted *Time for Results* in 1986, they proposed some "old-fashioned horse-trading."

"We'll regulate less," then-Gov. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee said, "if schools and school districts will produce better results."

Since then, more than 20 states have adopted "waiver" provisions that enable schools to request relief from regulations that stand in the way of change. Waivers can be sought in a variety of areas, ranging from personnel requirements, to curriculum, to length of the school day.

Policymakers expected that after years of complaining about excessive mandates from above, educators would jump at the chance to do things differently. But at both the state and district levels, officials are reporting far fewer requests for waivers than they had anticipated. And the requests they have received cover relatively minor rules and regulations.

In 1988, for example, Maine appropriated money so that 10 schools could redesign their programs from top to bottom. Since then, state officials have not received a single waiver request.

Massachusetts supplied funds for seven schools to "restructure" their programs in June 1988. The state has granted one waiver since then.

The reasons for such an underwhelming response are complicated, according to observers. They include skepticism among educators that waiver requests will be taken seriously, a shortage of creative ideas that would require exemptions from current practice, and locally imposed constraints.

Waivers may still be a useful tool even though they have not been enthusiastically embraced, experts contend. But, they say, the obstacles help shed light on the problems of limited deregulation—particularly in the absence of other incentives that encourage schools to change.

One of the most basic problems, experts said last week, is that many educators dis-

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Ky. Educators Hail Bill's School Reforms – And New Money

By Reagan Walker

MOUNT VERNON, KY.—The massive education package approved two weeks ago by the Kentucky legislature, which has drawn intense national attention for being on the cutting edge of school reform, looks a bit different when viewed from the craggy hills of this impoverished rural area.

To be sure, the 170 teachers and administrators of the Rockcastle County school system, based here, mostly welcome the radical changes in school governance and regulation brought about by the legislation.

The bill, which is expected to be signed into law this week by Gov. Wallace G. Wilkinson, has been hailed by education experts for such innovations as altering the role of the state education department, mandating site-based management, creating a statewide system of rewards and sanctions for schools, and focusing on early-

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Food-Service Companies Eye $5-Billion School-Lunch Market

Students eat lunch in a cafeteria run by the Marriott Corporation in the Saddleback Valley Unified School District in Mission Viejo, Cali.

By Ellen Flax

Leading food-service companies, long established as providers of meals at colleges, hospitals, and other institutions, appear bullish about their prospects for capturing a bigger share of the nearly $5-billion school-lunch market.

Noting that the market remains largely untapped by private contractors, some companies in the field say they expect their precollegiate business to grow by as much as 15 to 20 percent a year over the next several years. Other firms project smaller, but still significant, increases.

Although only 5 to 10 percent of K-12 institutions nationwide currently use private firms to manage their food programs, that figure represents a marked increase from a decade ago, when the proportion was "almost zero," according to Constance B. Girard-diCarlo, president of the school-nutrition-services division of ARA Services Inc.

Industry observers say that rising costs, as well as a desire to

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Also in the news

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Results from the first full-scale NAEP assessments show little in-depth understanding.

16 **Lobbying for Free Tuition**
A Louisiana oilman offers states a plan for giving low-income youths access to college.

IN SUMMARY

Questioning 'Lease Purchase'
The Florida Supreme Court is expected soon to decide a case that could bring a halt to hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of school construction in the state. **Page 4.**

School Chief Under Fire
Angered over personnel decisions and a new reform plan, black leaders in Columbus, Ohio, are calling for the ouster of the district's superintendent and six school-board members. **Page 5.**

Update on Child Abuse
More than 2.4 million incidents of child abuse or neglect were reported to child-protective-service agencies last year, a 10 percent increase over the previous year's total, a survey shows. **Page 8.**

'Black Flight' Disputed
A new study suggests that segregation in residential housing, not middle-class "black flight," is the cause of the increased concentration of poverty among blacks in urban areas. **Page 8.**

A Mandate for Choice
Washington appears poised to become only the second state after Ohio to require all school districts to adopt policies allowing intradistrict transfers by students. **Page 14.**

Mississippi's Second Wave
Leaving the question of a funding mechanism on hold, the Mississippi legislature last week approved a measure that marks the second stage of education-reform efforts in the state. **Page 14.**

Partisan Jousting
Members of the House Education and Labor Committee and Secretary Lauro F. Cavazos traded barbs at a hearing on the President's education bill and the Democrats' alternative. **Page 21.**

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EDUCATION WEEK (ISSN 0277-4232) is published 40 times per year (weekly except for the first week in January, the last week in June, the month of July, the first four weeks in August, and the last two weeks in December) by Editorial Projects in Education, Incorporated. Editorial and advertising sales offices are located at 4301 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 250, Washington, D.C. 20008. (202) 364-4114. Subscriptions: U.S.: $49.94 for 40 issues. Canada: $72.94 for 40 issues. Foreign: $114.94 (airmail) and $82.94 (surface mail) for 40 issues. Second-class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to EDUCATION WEEK, P.O. Box 2083, Marion, Ohio 43305. Volume IX, Issue 29.

ACROSS THE NATION

NATIONAL

Most Elementary Principals Favor Longer School Year, Survey Says

Two-thirds of the principals who responded to a recent survey supported a longer school year, and one-third favored a longer day for teachers, according to the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

Nearly one-third of the 479 principals who responded to N.A.E.S.P.'s survey said the school year should be extended by a month, from 175-180 days to 200 days, while nearly 40 percent favored a year-round schedule with vacation time distributed throughout the year.

While 48 percent of the principals would retain the current school day of approximately six hours, 33 percent supported setting aside additional time for teachers to tutor students who need extra help.

The survey, released at the N.A.E.S.P.'s annual convention in San Antonio last week, queried principals on their views on the "basic school" concept advanced by Ernest L. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

More than half of the respondents supported Mr. Boyer's contention that schools should focus primarily on language and computational development in the early grades. But one-third said early-childhood curricula should be expanded to help children develop emotional and social skills.

More than 90 percent of the respondents also called for a "complete unit of support staff," including such personnel as a nurse, psychologist, social worker, counselor, and bilingual educator.

About 47 percent of the respondents supported the idea of eliminating rigid grade levels in the early grades, but their views on which grades to merge varied.

To gauge student progress, the largest number of respondents favored using a combination of writing samples, student portfolios, and teacher assessments in addition to or instead of traditional tests.

■ **Chevron U.S.A. is donating $1.45 million over three years to the Accelerated Schools Program for at-risk children,** the corporation announced last week.

The Accelerated Schools Program, developed by Henry M. Levin, director of Stanford University's Center for Educational Research, is designed to motivate at-risk children by challenging them with an accelerated curriculum as opposed to using a traditional remedial approach. A total of 39 schools in Illinois, Missouri, Salt Lake City, and the San Francisco Bay area now use the curriculum.

The Chevron funding will go to introduce the program to schools in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, and New Orleans.

Satellite campuses supervised by the Stanford center will be established at San Francisco State University, Los Angeles State University, the University of Houston, and the University of New Orleans to introduce the program to local elementary and middle schools. Each campus will receive $180,000, and the Stanford center will receive $729,000 to supervise the work of the four campuses.

STATES

North Carolina Arts Educators Protest Vote To Drop Mandate

Arts educators in North Carolina are asking the state board of education to reconsider a decision to drop a requirement that students take an arts course to be eligible for the North Carolina Scholars Program diploma.

The special diploma, earned by about 14 percent of the state's high-school graduates last year, is intended to honor students who complete a rigorous academic curriculum.

In a move to strengthen the academic character of the diploma, the board last month voted to replace requirements for arts and vocational-education coursework with additional requirements in mathematics and science, and to rename the program the Academic Scholars Program.

"We have nothing against arts or vocational education," said Roger Schurrer, staff assistant in program services in the state department of education. "Does the diploma denote a comprehensive program, or a narrow academic focus?"

But Emmy Whitehead, president of the North Carolina Art Education Association, called the move misguided, and warned that it could destroy the state's highly regarded arts program by cutting back enrollments.

"We've worked so hard to let it go down the tubes," she said.

■ **The test scores of minority students in Pennsylvania are not improving despite the existence of a five-year-old remedial-education program,** the state Human Relations Commission has concluded.

The commission studied the standardized test scores of black children in 111 districts where 100 or more such students were enrolled and found about 71 percent needed special instruction in math or reading or both.

It examined the scores of Hispanic children in 44 districts where 50 or more such students were enrolled and found that 75 percent of the children tested poorly enough to warrant remedial instruction.

Forty percent of the Hispanic students and 44 percent of the black students who were 9th graders in 1986-1987 were found to have dropped out by their senior year, a commission official said.

DISTRICTS

Interdistrict Desegregation Plan Ordered for Kansas City Schools

Black students living in Kansas City, Mo., will gain the right to transfer to suburban school districts at state expense under a unanimous federal appeals panel ruling issued last week.

The three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit ordered a lower-court judge to develop an interdistrict desegregation plan that would allow up to 1,200 black students to transfer next year, and would gradually increase the ceiling to 6,000 students over the next five years.

The ruling could end a stalemate that has prevented adoption of a voluntary interdistrict transfer plan since 1985, when a lower court ordered the state of Missouri to develop and pay for such a plan as part of a comprehensive desegregation remedy.

But last week's ruling came in a separate case that was filed on behalf of 184 black students who had sought and were denied admission to three suburban districts for the 1988-89 school year.

The appeals court ruled that a lower court had erred in dismissing the second case in a summary judgment, and hinted that it could proceed to trial if the suburban districts, who are not a party to the main desegregation case, continued to refuse to admit the students.

The interdistrict plan would be similar to one now in place in St. Louis, under which 12,000 black students are enrolled in suburban districts at state expense.

■ **The former president of Community School Board 9 in New York City has been sentenced to six months in jail and 4½ years on probation for taking bribes from school-district vendors.**

Curtis Johnson admitted receiving kickbacks worth $18,000 from vendors in return for approving falsified purchase orders, and pleaded guilty to charges of receiving bribes, grand larceny, defrauding the government, and official misconduct, according to the Bronx district attorney's office.

The incidents were uncovered during ongoing investigations of corruption and mismanagement in the city's 32 community

AP/Wide World

MISSISSIPPI LEARNING—Gov. Ray Mabus checks out the use of personal computers in a kindergarten class in Jackson, Miss., recently. As part of its education-reform efforts, the state plans to place computers in all public kindergartens.

school districts. Nearly a dozen school officials have already been arrested as a result of the probes.

■ **A journalism class at Dearborn (Mich.) High School sparked a furor last month when it attempted to measure anti-Arab prejudice and was accused of perpetuating such prejudice through its survey.**

Included in the survey were questions that asked non-Arab students if they believed Arab students are too aggressive, steal, deal drugs, have poor personal hygiene, or discriminate against women.

Arab-American students, who account for about 10 percent of the school's enrollment, complained that they had not even heard of many of the listed stereotypes until the survey publicized them.

The school's principal, Ann Superko, sent a letter of apology to Arab students and their parents, and withheld the survey results from publication in the student paper.

■ **The former superintendent of the Carlsbad, N.M., school district, ousted amid allegations of fraud in office, has filed a lawsuit contending that he was denied due process in his dismissal.**

Roger Harrell filed the lawsuit last month in state court. School-board members voted 5 to 0 to fire him after reviewing a list of 23 allegations against the superintendent. Among other charges, the district contends that Mr. Harrell filed twice for reimbursements for business trips and filled his airplane with district gasoline to take personal trips, according to Pat Gaffney, the acting superintendent.

Mr. Harrell, who has mounted a public campaign on his own behalf, is scheduled to have an arbitration hearing in early May as part of the procedure for removing him, Mr. Gaffney said. His lawsuit seeks his reinstatement as superintendent and asks the court to halt any further attempt to remove him from the job.

■ **A citizens' group has filed suit against officials of Rio Arriba County, N.M., over the scheduled construction of a jail next to an elementary school.**

The lawsuit, filed March 27 in U.S. District Court in Albuquerque, seeks to prevent the jail from being built next to an elementary school in Tierra Amarilla.

County officials did not tell voters the location of the proposed 50-bed jail until after the voters approved a bond issue to build the facility, the lawsuit contends.

The suit was filed by People for Rights of Children's Education, as well as three members of the Chama Valley school board. The board decided against filing its own lawsuit against the county, according to the superintendent, Delfinio Trujillo.

■ **A rapist, a robber, a prostitute, and a dozen other convicted felons have been fired as school-bus drivers in Houston.**

The drivers' felonious pasts were revealed late last month in a copyrighted story in *The Houston Post*. The article reported that 157—17.7 percent—of the district's drivers had criminal records.

Jean Raymond, superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, fired at least 15 drivers as a result of the story. Most of the drivers were fired for lying about their pasts, Ms. Raymond said, although some were fired because of the severity of their crimes.

According to the *Post*, 22 drivers had been sentenced for at least one felony; two had been convicted of committing misdemeanor sex offenses; and five had been found guilty of drunken driving. *Post* reporters checked Harris County records dating back to 1976.

According to its spokesman, the district has a system for checking the police records of all new employees. But the newspaper's investigation was much more thorough, she said, and revealed crimes committed after the drivers were hired and before the district's record-checking system was established in 1988.

The district currently is investigating ways to improve its system, the spokesman added.

■ **A school-based health clinic in Cambridge, Mass., will be the first in the state to dispense condoms to students as a way of preventing the spread of AIDS.**

By a vote of 4 to 3, the Cambridge School Committee last week approved the distribution of condoms at a health center run by the city in the Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School. No date has been set for distribution to begin. The health department was also charged with developing protocols for distributing the condoms.

The panel had approved the policy at its March meeting, but two members who voted against the decision asked for it to be reconsidered this month.

■ **Massachusetts school officials are exerting pressure on the Boston School Committee to help individual schools that have not been successful in attracting students under the district's new "controlled choice" plan to become more educationally effective and attractive.**

The state board of education is scheduled to vote this month on whether to approve the district's proposal to implement a new student-assignment plan for all grade levels in the district beginning next fall.

During its first limited year of operation, the plan has proved to be an effective means of improving desegregation in the district, state officials said..

The educational reorganization called for in the plan, however, has been delayed by a variety of factors, especially in the district's high schools, they added.

The state board may grant only provisional approval of the plan if improvements in meeting the reorganization are not made, said Charles Glenn, director of a new state team that is monitoring Boston's effort.

DIMENSIONS

Education Grants to States

In fiscal year 1989, the U.S. Education Department awarded $10,246,045,000 in grants to state and local governments, according to data compiled by the Bureau of the Census.

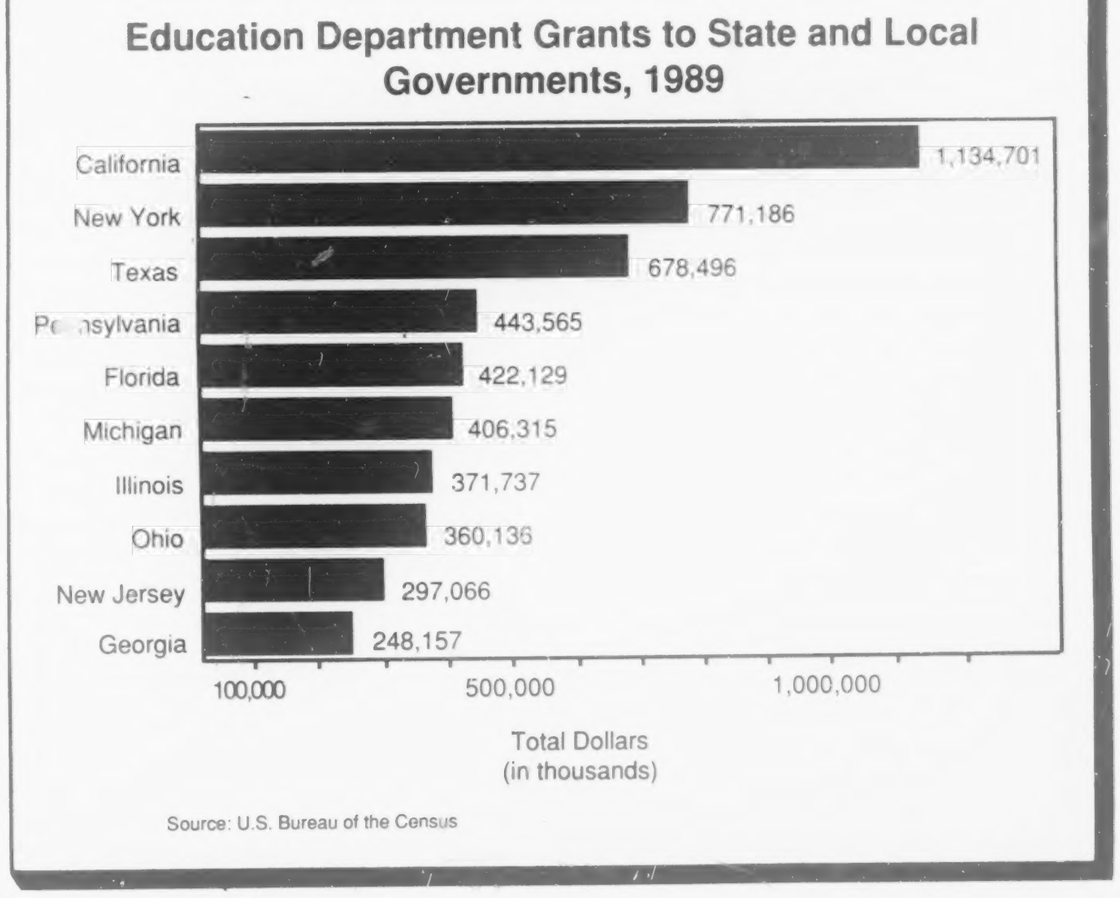
California led the states with more than $1 billion in grants, nearly half of which ($455,494,000) went for compensatory education for the disadvantaged, the bureau reported. The only other state to receive more than $300 million in compensatory-education grants was New York ($431,680,000).

The second-largest category of aid awarded to California was for education for the handicapped ($307,771,000)—by far the largest total under that category for any state.

The Northern Marianas Islands received the least amount of money ($1,911,000), most of it going for school-improvement programs.

The figures include all cash grants, payments for grants-in-kind, shared revenues, and research and development funds. They exclude payments to nonprofit organizations and individuals, or for salaries. Also not included are grants managed by the Agriculture Department for child-nutrition programs and the special milk program.

The data are in the report "Federal Expenditures by State for Fiscal Year 1989," available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.



UPDATE

■ **The Kentucky Court of Appeals has upheld a lower-court ruling that dismissed charges of "educational malpractice" against a private school.**

The lawsuit was brought in 1988 by Arnold Rich, on behalf of his son John, who has attention-deficit disorder—a learning disability characteritzed by an inability to concentrate. The youth attended the Kentucky Country Day School of Louisville from 1978 to 1987.

The school would not admit the youth for the 10th grade, however, because of poor grades. The Riches charged that the school did not diagnose John's disorder and provide him with an appropriate education.

Last April, a circuit-court judge ruled in favor of the school, saying that there is "no standard of care" for measuring an educator's conduct. *(See Education Week, April 19, 1989.)*

The appeals court last week upheld that decision.

"The fact parents may pay tuition either privately or through taxes gives them no right to dictate to the educational system under threat of an action at law," the court said.

■ **Four years after it first began to inspect test booklets for improper erasures, the California Department of Education has announced that it now finds no evidence of tampering on the California Assessment Program tests.**

In 1986, department officials said, the state found 41 cases of suspicious erasures, out of 11,400 situations in which tests are administered. The number of cases declined to 16 in 1987, to 11 in 1988, and to zero in 1989, officials said.

The allegations of tampering became a heated issue in Los Angeles in 1988, when teachers'-union officials there charged that district officials had blamed teachers for the incidents, and refused to administer standardized tests. District officials later denied accusing teachers of tampering with the tests and agreed to institute security measures. *(See Education Week, Nov. 2, 1988.)*

State officials attributed the decline in tampering to new test-security procedures, which require booklets to be distributed to schools and returned to district offices in sealed envelopes, as well as to publicity surrounding the previous incidents of tampering. Although several teachers and principals had been fired as a result of the incidents, they said, the practice of inspecting the booklets was aimed at deterring others from tampering with the tests.

"We let schools know that we would carefully examine all test booklets for suspicious erasures and answer changes, and that we would eliminate scores for any school found to have marking or test-administration irregularities," said Bill Honig, the superintendent of public instruction. "We have had excellent cooperation, and the numbers tell the story."

■ **An analysis of recent principal selections in Chicago has revealed no systematic pattern of discrimination by local school councils in cases where the majority of board members were of a different race than the principal.**

The study was conducted, in part, to counter charges that race was a factor in the decisions of the school councils, which were exercising their powers to hire and fire principals for the first time under the district's landmark reform measure. *(See Education Week, March 14, 1990.)*

Eighty-nine percent of permanent principals of all races who were up for review this year have been offered new contracts, according to the analysis. The survey—conducted by Designs for Change, a local research and advocacy group—also revealed that only 68 percent of the interim principals were retained.

White and black principals were far more likely to be retained than were Hispanic principals, the study found. Its authors attributed the disparity largely to the fact that 81 percent of the Hispanic principals who were up for review this year were interim principals.

When retirements are included in the calculations, the study revealed, the turnover rate for principals in the district has been roughly 30 percent since June 1988, when the reform law abolishing lifetime tenure for principals was enacted.

History and Civics Tests Reveal Knowledge Gaps

By Robert Rothman

WASHINGTON—American students, including high-school seniors a year away from voting age, demonstrate a "limited" understanding of fundamental concepts of U.S. history and civics, two reports issued here last week have concluded.

The reports by the National Assessment of Educational Progress were based on tests administered in 1988—the first to gauge students' knowledge in the two subjects across three grade levels. The results also showed substantial achievement gaps at all grade levels between black and white students and between those from advantaged and from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Trend studies, which compare the 1988 results with those of prior surveys, revealed that 17-year-olds' performance remained stable or declined since the mid-1980's.

Over all, the reports note, students showed some familiarity with basic facts of history and government. But their knowledge tended to be uneven, and failed to demonstrate in-depth understanding of the subjects.

For example, although most 12th graders appeared to be familiar with the U.S. Presidents, fewer than half could write an adequate description of Presidential responsibilities.

Chester E. Finn Jr., the chairman of NAEP's governing board, noted that the results are similar to the poor performance displayed on previously released NAEP assessments in reading, writing, and geography.

But the history and civics results are "cause for special concern," he said, because "these subjects lie at the heart of one of the central responsibilities of American schools: preparing students to participate as citizens in the affairs of our democratic republic."

U.S. students' lackluster performance in these areas is "ironic," he suggested, in light of the blossoming of democracy throughout the world.

"It seems to me sad, but probably true," the former assistant secretary of education said at a press conference here, "that millions of people outside our borders possess a keener sense of the importance of such things than do our own sons and daughters."

Mr. Finn added that, together with the results of NAEP's geography assessment, the findings from the history and civics assessments suggest that the three main pillars of social-studies instruction are "failing."

But Frances Haley, executive director of the National Council for the Social Studies, rejected that view. The overwhelming majority of 4th graders, and nearly all 8th and 12th graders, she pointed out, demonstrated rudimentary knowledge of history and civics.

"There is evidence they do know the basic facts of those subjects," Ms. Haley said in an interview. "We still have a way to go in getting up to higher levels of thinking."

She also noted that many states and school districts are revamping their social-studies curricula along the lines suggested by reform reports by the Bradley Commission on History in Schools and the National Commission on Social Studies in Schools.

"By the next assessment," she said, "we'll see whether curricular reforms are making any difference."

Performance Drops

NAEP is a Congressionally mandated project that tests a national sample of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 every two years in a variety of subjects.

The 1988 history assessment, which tested 16,000 students in about 1,000 schools, was the first in that subject to be included in NAEP's regular battery. Under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, NAEP in 1986 conducted a special U.S. history assessment of 17-year-olds. Results from it were published in the book *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?*, written by Mr. Finn and the education historian Diane Ravitch.

A 1988 test of 2,300 11th graders, conducted in addition to the larger assessment, found little overall change from the 1986 performance, which Mr. Finn and Ms. Ravitch called "shameful."

The larger history assessment found that the vast majority of students at all grade levels knew simple historical facts, such as the national bird of the United States, and that most 8th and 12th graders showed rudimentary interpretive skills, such as the ability to identify the war in which a sample letter might have been written.

Relatively few 4th graders could perform above the basic level, it noted. But this finding was not surprising, according to the report, since few schools teach U.S. history before the 5th grade.

But the study also found that older students' performance dropped sharply at higher levels of proficiency. Only 13 percent of the 8th graders and fewer than half the seniors demonstrated an understanding of historical relationships, and only 5 percent of the 12th graders showed the broad understanding the report says "may help them to understand the controversies associated with current political, social, and economic issues."

Within each grade, moreover, the gaps between white and minority students' performance were substantial. Although 85 percent of the white 4th graders could perform at the basic level, only half of the blacks and Hispanics in that grade demonstrated such proficiency.

Similarly, students from advantaged urban communities—metropolitan areas where higher-income professionals predominate—outperformed those from rural and from disadvantaged urban areas at each grade level.

'Trivial Pursuit'

In analyzing students' responses to particular questions, former Gov. Richard Riley of South Carolina said at the press conference that they indicate students possess a " 'Trivial Pursuit' sort of familiarity with some of the key figures and dramatic events of our past."

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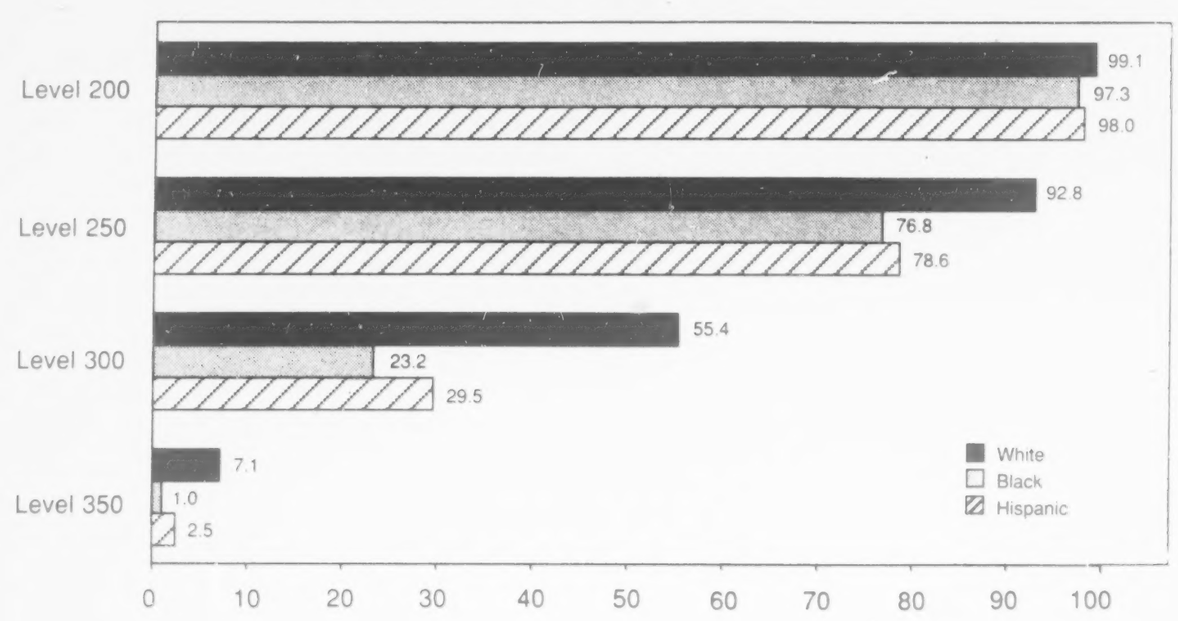
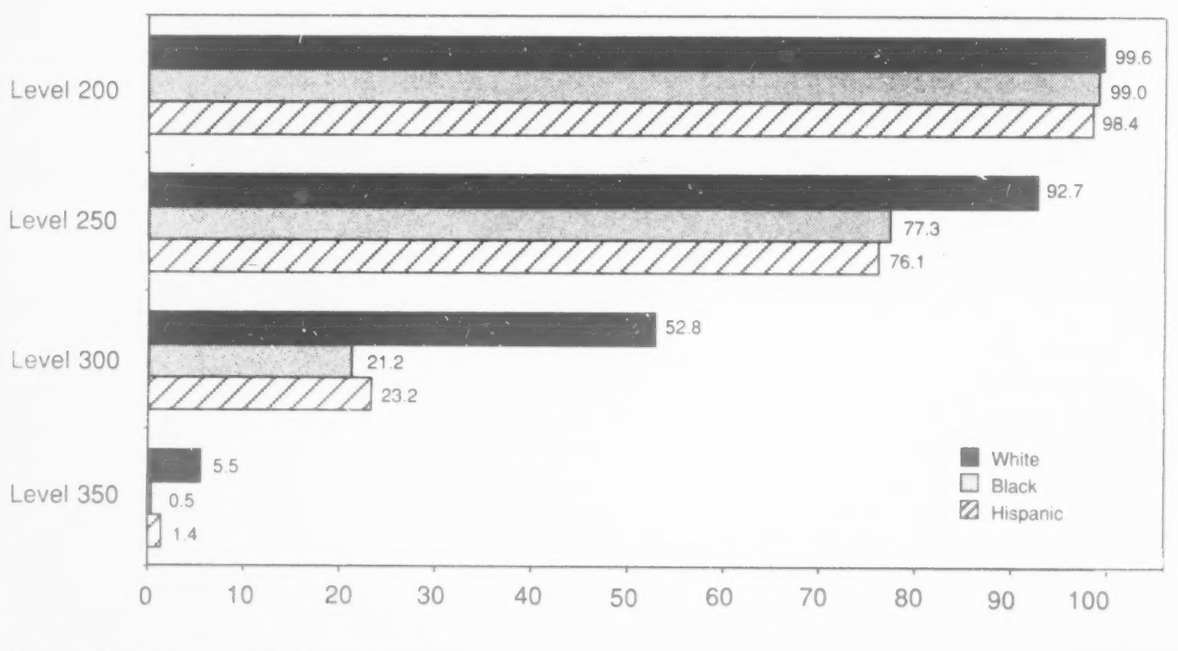
Levels of Civics Proficiency: Results by Race/Ethnicity, 1988



Levels of U.S. History Proficiency: Results by Race/Ethnicity, 1988



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

Black Groups Urge Columbus Superintendent's Ouster

By Peter Schmidt

Black community groups in Columbus, Ohio, last week were calling for the ouster of Superintendent of Schools Ronald E. Etheridge and six of seven school-board members, in response to the dismissal of several black administrators and implementation of a reform plan some critics term racist.

Leaders of one of the groups, the Committee to Remember the Children, vowed to campaign against an upcoming district levy needed to finance the reform plan. They also claimed to have half of the 22,000 signatures needed to petition the Franklin County Probate Court to hold a hearing on the dismissal of the board members.

Other groups were calling for students to boycott school if Mr. Etheridge, who is white, does not resign by April 30.

Late last month, Mr. Etheridge narrowly avoided being removed from office when four board members nearly forced a vote on buying out the remaining 16 months of his three-year contract.

Several board members last week described the superintendent as a bright leader whose actions were designed to improve education for all children in the district, which has a 38 percent dropout rate.

They added, however, that he appears to lack public-relations skills and has almost completely lost the confidence of black leaders, who fear the district is becoming resegregated. The district, which is 47 percent black, was under a federal desegregation order from March 1977 to April 1985.

"I feel that the district needs to move ahead, and I'm not sure it can do that with Dr. Etheridge at the helm," said Sharlene J. Morgan, vice president of the board, and one of the four who opposed him last month.

"We tried to do too much too quickly," said another board member, Myrl Shoemaker Jr. "Those personnel decisions have become a lightning rod for attacks."

As part of a four-year reform plan begun this year, the district has eliminated 41 administrative positions.

As a first step toward making the cuts, Mr. Etheridge notified 61 administrators in January that they might lose their jobs. Since then, 9 have been dismissed, 21 have been placed on one-year contracts, and the remaining 31 have obtained a temporary restraining order preventing the board from dismissing them.

Mr. Etheridge said the cuts were necessary because the number of administrators had grown by 20 percent over the last decade while enrollment decreased by more than 40 percent, from 110,000 to 65,000.

Several black leaders have alleged that Mr. Etheridge deliberately dismissed several of the most respected black administrators, as well as black and white administrators who were involved in the district's busing program for desegregating the schools.

Insensitive to Minorities

David D. Hamlar, a former school-board president and the chairman of the Committee to Remember the Children, contended that the current board's personnel decisions show an insensitivity to minority concerns that has also been displayed in other decisions.

For example, Mr. Hamlar accused the board of endorsing curriculum reforms that, he said, threaten to track black students toward menial jobs. He and Charles O. Ross, a leader of the African Community School Council, also asserted that the board's reform plan threatens to resegregate schools by carving the district into six "communities of schools."

In an interview last week, Mr. Etheridge said the district had sent some 800 letters to civic groups in an effort to improve community relations. In addition, he said, James R. Oglesby, president of the National School Boards Association, will be consulting with the district on ways to improve its internal relations.

Mr. Etheridge, a former Savannah, Ga., superintendent, said he has tried to be a "change agent" for the Columbus district. But, he said, "I don't think there is a level of communication high enough to offset what has come out of this change."

"It's unfortunate," he added, "that those of us in urban districts who are trying to do our jobs incur the wrath of citizens who, quite frankly, are not understanding entirely what we are attempting to do."

NAEP History, Civics Tests Reveal Knowledge Gaps

Continued from Page 5

For example, although three-fourths of the junior-high-school students knew the date the Declaration of Independence was issued, only a third could identify its opening paragraph.

Mr. Riley also noted that black students performed relatively well—in some cases outperforming their white peers—on questions dealing with blacks in history.

"This shows clearly that such material belongs in the curriculum, though I believe it is a part of America's history that should be taught to all children—black and white alike," he said. "Conversely, there is a need for black students to have a much better knowledge of the general history of the nation of which they, like all of us, are part."

Ina V.S. Mullis, NAEP's deputy director, also noted that most students, regardless of race, performed relatively poorly on the open-ended test items, which asked them to use their knowledge to write answers, rather than choose from among preselected responses.

For example, she noted, when asked to compare the powers of the Presidency today with those of Washington's era, only 40 percent of the 12th graders could provide at least two reasons for a difference in Presidential power, and only 10 percent could elaborate on their responses.

"The results to this question are especially disappointing," she said, "in light of the prevailing emphasis in assessment on using performance measures to tap students' thinking and problem-solving skills."

But Ms. Haley of the social-studies council noted that the 1988 results provide "baseline data" that could show improvements in the future as states and districts shift away from a reliance on multiple-choice testing.

The report also found that, in contrast to the NAEP geography assessment, the overwhelming majority of students who reported taking history and social-studies coursework outperformed those who had not.

More than two-thirds of the 4th graders reported studying social studies at least three times a week, 95 percent of the 8th graders said they had taken U.S. history between the 5th and the 8th grades, and 98 percent of the 12th graders said they took the subject in high school.

But 83 percent of the seniors said they spent less than two hours a week on history homework, and the performance of those students was worse than that of their classmates who reported spending more than three hours on homework each week.

The assessment revealed, in addition, that most history instruction is characterized by reading from textbooks, with little attention given to strategies researchers say enhance learning, such as reading primary-source materials, engaging in group work, and writing.

'Pool of Future Leaders'

The report on the civics assessment was based on a 1988 test of 11,000 students in grades 4, 8, and 12, as well as a separate test to compare the performance of 13- and 17-year-olds with that of students in those grades tested in 1976 and 1982.

The study found that while 13-year-olds' performance was equivalent to, or slightly higher than, that of students from past years, 17-year-olds' performance declined significantly over the 12-year period.

This decline, it found, occurred almost entirely among white students. The gap between the civics achievement of whites and of blacks and Hispanics, while substantial, narrowed between 1976 and 1988, according to the report.

In 1988, the vast majority of students at all grade levels showed a rudimentary knowledge of civic life, such as understanding the purpose of traffic signals. And most of those in the upper grades demonstrated a basic understanding of political institutions.

But only 13 percent of the 8th graders and 49 percent of the high-school seniors understood specific governmental functions, such as how the Chief Justice of the United States is selected.

"Since knowledge and understandings of this sort would likely help students to act as informed citizens," the report says, "it is disappointing that fewer than half the 12th-grade students reached this level of competence in the 1988 assessment."

Far fewer—only 6 percent of the seniors—reached the highest level of performance, a total the report calls "disappointing" since that group "may well represent the pool from which future leaders are drawn."

'Uneven Understanding'

As in the history assessment, the civics assessment found sharp gaps between the performance of advantaged and disadvantaged youths. For example, only 39 percent of the disadvantaged 8th graders demonstrated familiarity with constitutional rights, such as the right to vote, compared with 70 percent of their more advantaged peers.

But, the study found, students from rural areas performed relatively well on the civics test, and in some cases outperformed those from advantaged urban areas.

Although students from all areas showed a range of knowledge across all aspects of civics tested, with their performance increasing as they progressed through school, they "demonstrated a surprisingly uneven understanding within the various areas of the civics assessment," according to Ms. Mullis.

For example, she noted, even though students were familiar with voting and elections by the 4th grade, only 36 percent of the 8th graders and 57 percent of the 12th graders knew that Presidential candidates were nominated by party conventions. This finding is particularly surprising, Ms. Mullis said, since the assessment was administered during the peak of the 1988 primary season.

Few students reported that their civics classrooms employed instructional methods such as mock governments or trials. But those who did outperformed those who did not.

Copies of "The U.S. History Report Card" and "The Civics Report Card" are available for $14 each from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, P.O. Box 6710, Princeton, N.J. 08541-6710.

ADVERTISEMENT

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

America's Public Schools

Making Our Democracy Work

This nation's system of free and universal public education has played a crucial role in creating a strong and democratic America. Public schools are the foundation of our system of self-government. As Thomas Jefferson once put it, "Education is the anvil on which democracy is forged."

Jefferson understood that democracy—a system of government that rests on not merely the consent, *but on the participation*, of the governed—cannot long survive in the absence of an informed and educated citizenry.

Public education has also served as the vehicle for crafting our pluralistic society into a viable democracy.

More than any other country, we are a nation of immigrants—a nation without a common ethnic, racial, or religious background. Public schools have been, and continue to be, the primary institution responsible for forging cohesiveness from this diversity.

Our schools have transmitted a set of shared national values—while teaching students of widely differing backgrounds to understand and respect their differences. No other institution in America is equipped to serve this unifying function on a national scale.

Finally, by providing access and opportunity to generations of Americans, regardless of race, creed, or economic status, our schools have been instrumental in helping America live up to the ideals of equity on which it is founded.

KEITH GEIGER
President, NEA

I'm not suggesting that our schools are perfect. Nor am I attempting to invoke some golden age of American education to which we should strive to return. America's public schools have never served their students—or their nation—perfectly. But they have served both students and nation well.

Let us never forget that America is where it is today because of our public schools. And we—as a nation—will only get where we want to be tomorrow if we preserve, and strengthen, our system of public education.

It's important to remind ourselves of this central point as we move ahead with the pressing work of school improvement. There's no doubt that our public schools are in need of an overhaul if they're to meet the changing needs of our students, our society, and our economy.

But we're not starting from scratch. Nor are we rescuing a bankrupt or failed institution. Just the opposite. Our job today is to perfect a highly successful *and indispensable* American institution—public education.

Accomplishing this task requires restructuring schools from the bottom up, a process that will challenge traditional ways of schooling, teaching, and learning.

If we're to succeed at this task, we must democratize American public education. This means granting school employees, parents, and their communities meaningful participation in the decisions that shape their schools—and ultimately their lives.

It also means involving students as active participants in the learning process and tailoring instruction to meet the varying, and multiple, needs of all learners.

The work before us is far from easy. But it's worth the effort. At stake is the future of our schools, our students, and our nation.

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